

## Who shot John Paul?

It is nearly certain that Italy will proceed to trial in the conspiracy to assassinate Pope John Paul II. Italian officials are seeking the indictment of nine men — three Bulgarians and six Turks, including convicted triggerman Mehmet Ali Agca, now serving a life term for what has been called, not inappropriately, the crime of the century.

Following a three-year investigation, the Italian judiciary charges that Agca was hired by the Bulgarian secret service. The motive: to weaken Poland's Solidarity movement, whose rise, the report says, "constituted a most acute crisis for the socialist states of Eastern Europe." This is scarcely the first time such a charge has been made: socialist union leader Luigi Scicciolo, arrested in 1982 in the kidnapping of U.S. Gen. James Lee Dozier, said the Bulgarians asked him to shoot Solidarity leader Lech Walesa — a request Agca says also was made of him.

Since Agca's eventual target was the pope, spiritual leader of nearly one-sixth of the world's population, the case is more sinister still, and the implications enormous. After several years of uncertainty, reason-

able persons should be relieved to see the clouds about to lift — at least to some extent. (The prosecutor's report reaches its conspiracy conclusion without putting a smoking gun in the hands of the Soviets, although other investigations, most notably journalist Claire Sterling's, suggest that the trail leads to the KGB.)

One thing is unmistakable: the odd and disturbing habit of denial since the shooting, and not exclusively by those charged in the plot. The American CIA has repeatedly let the Eastern bloc off the hook — quite charitable, since half the communist world has been blaming the CIA for the shooting. Much of the Western media, too, has failed to pursue the story with zeal. (That *The New York Times* gave Mrs. Sterling's dispatch on the prosecutor's report enormous play in last Sunday's editions is more than a little encouraging.)

What if the Bulgarians are guilty as charged? And what if Yuri Andropov made the ugly arrangements? Once this crime comes to trial, President Reagan's "Evil Empire" characterization could gain more credence still.